

THE OLDEST STORY WRITER IN AMERICA.

Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, the Author of "Hugh Wynne."

Career of the Author-Physician. His Professional Experiences Fitted Him Admirably for Fiction Writing—Accidental Publication of His First Periodical Contribution. Dr. Holmes' Advice.

(Copyright, 1897.)

Philadelphia, Feb. 5.—Dr. S. Weir Mitchell, the oldest story writer in America, whose novel "Hugh Wynne, Free Quaker," has reached a sale of 10,000, comes honestly by his unusual abilities, both medical and literary. His grandfather, Alexander Mitchell of Virginia, was of Scotch birth and one of the ablest physicians in the valley of Virginia. Father in life Dr. John K. Mitchell, father of the present author, physician, established himself in Philadelphia. First born as a practitioner and a student in Jefferson Medical College he earned wide reputation as a leader in his profession. He was one of the first to make scientific investigation of "animal magnetism," or hypnosis, as we now term it. His original studies of fevers were much in advance of his time and his contributions to medical literature of the day were generally recognized. He also wrote several poems and one or two stories of merit. Two of his lyrics, "The Old Song and the New Song" and "Pearl Leaf," were published in "The Atlantic," Dr. Holmes' magazine. Dr. Mitchell was one of eight children, of whom two sisters and a brother survive. Three of the brothers served in the civil war.

Dr. Mitchell's boyhood was passed in the quiet life of a large family. The members of which were constantly exposed to intellectual activity through the example of a father at all times mentally alert, who constantly encouraged his children in discussion of the literature of their own and earlier times. The boy's natural trend toward letters was also greatly fostered by the freedom of his father's large library, a freedom that was restricted in one particular only—the father would not allow until the lad was old enough, in his father's judgment, to read with discretion. It was not until he was 15 that he was permitted to read a novel. The first was "The Red Rover," which he read with great interest. He then turned to "The Pilgrim's Progress," which he read with still greater interest. He then turned to "The Pilgrim's Progress," which he read with still greater interest.

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At this time he decided to study medicine. It is well known by the friends of the Mitchell family that the doctor's father did not see promise of success in the son's studies, and, moreover, he predicted failure until after the young man had been studying for some time. This prediction was proved a mistake one year before the father's death in 1855, though even then no one could have foreseen the full measure of success that was in store for the son.

It is only natural, under the circumstances, that Dr. Weir Mitchell should make verses when he was a boy and that he should continue to write after he had begun the practice of medicine. When a lad, he attracted the notice of Oliver Wendell Holmes at the house of Dr. John K. Mitchell, and he is always the older poet that he gave him a copy of his "Ballad of the Constitution."



which is still said to be among the best possessions of the author of "Hugh Wynne." When later Dr. Mitchell, at 27, decided to print a small volume of verse, it was referred by the publishers, Ticknor & Fields, to Dr. Holmes for consideration. As is well known, from the statement made in the dedication of one of Dr. Mitchell's books, Dr. Holmes advised Dr. Mitchell to withdraw these verses and to reconsider them at 40. Dr. Holmes impressed strongly upon the younger friend the belief that a man could not actively and with equal success conduct two

things so substantially apart as medicine and literature. The advice he gave was immediately followed by Dr. Mitchell. He had the verses tucked away in a drawer, and while this is often quite enough for men of more than average ability it lacked a good deal of fully compensating his time and energy. His lamplight came into the writing of papers on medical and allied topics, the best of which were published in 1855, and before the decade between 1855 and 1860 was advanced he had begun a series of papers on medicine, the nature of which, particularly the chemical nature of snake venoms. Early in the sixties a large and handsomely illustrated quarto volume containing the

an elegant quarto volume, with illustrations, which has materially advanced the knowledge of snake poisons, and which is not simple, but complex and multiple. Other contributions to the knowledge of medicine appeared from time to time from Dr. Mitchell's pen, and he has ever and over resumed his investigations in this direction. Quite recently he read an important paper upon "Cerebral Palsy" before the National Academy of Sciences. This will shortly appear in print.

In 1863 Dr. Mitchell entered upon three years' work as an army surgeon, serving first in the Christian Street (Philadelphia) hospital and later in the Turner Lane hospital. He had special charge of soldiers suffering from nervous disorders and gained him an authority upon almost every form of chronic disease, but especially nervous diseases of the nervous system. About 18 years ago he lectured in Baltimore upon what is now known in America as the "Weir Mitchell treatment." At first this treatment was launched on both sides of the Atlantic, and it is now a well known and almost universal remedy for nervous conditions, which it is reported were considered far too brilliant for belief. It has received numerous

praises of writers and physicians, and has won recognition in the practice of the most eminent physicians. All told, Dr. Mitchell's scientific and professional publications, comprising a number of papers, pamphlets and volumes, issued from 1857 to 1891, inclusive—number 127. Every one of them is the result of original personal investigation, and they are mostly based on his own observations. He has been asked more than once to compile voluminous textbooks, but he has always declined, and he is not willing to undertake labor in which he must depend almost altogether on the brains and work of other persons.

His serious literary career was commenced in 1865. Then, after having chipped the wise words of Dr. Holmes in his mind, he began to write. He devoted himself heart and soul to his profession for nearly 25 years. Dr. Mitchell felt that he could return to the pen he had once loved and use it again for the writing of other things than the scientific and professional papers which he had written in his experience in hospitals and as a general practitioner had served him most admirably as a preliminary school for the study of literary nature, and there is not the slightest doubt that his power as a fiction writer is in great part due to his previous study of the science of human experience which he has been able to lay up during his professional career.

Dr. Mitchell's first contribution to the popular press came about by accident, and the story thereof, which has probably not been in print before, comes to me from a perfectly reliable source in this form:

It was the close of the war he was one day humorously discussing with friends the question as to whether or not it is practicable to select any portion of one's individuality. As a result of that discussion he wrote for instance, "The Pilgrim's Progress," which he had written in the style of both arms and both legs. The paper was an exceedingly clever one,

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BY WIRE TO KLONDIKE.

A New Telegraph Route Soon to Be Opened—The Four Chief Routes to Alaska.

Very soon the weary overland traveler to the Klondike will be able to follow a more direct route, by connecting the telegraph poles. For it will only be a short while before the new line will be connected by wire with the outer world.

The route for the first telegraph line into the Klondike at Dawson has been decided upon, and by the middle of next summer the line will be open for business. Mr. Charles H. Hammer, superintendent of the Pacific Postal Telegraph company, which in reality is the Canadian Pacific Railway company, under another name, is now in Montreal completing the last details of the plan.

In reality the actual work has begun and the surveyors have already accomplished a great deal between Dawson and Fort Fraser—the first two points upon the route—where the first section of the new line is located. Not since 1866, when the Northern Pacific Telegraph company made the famous attempt to connect Asia and the United States, has a telegraph survey been seen in the country through which the new line will run until the present party in the field began its journey.

The total length of the main line from Dawson, B. C., to Dawson City will be 1,425 miles. There will be a branch line, constructed to Dawson City, 100 miles in length, and another branch to Dyea, which will be 95 miles long. The company estimates that the total cost of the line and its branches will be in the vicinity of \$500,000. Of course this total cost will depend largely on the difficulties met with in survey and construction, for a considerable portion of the route is unknown in detail. The estimate given, however, is a conservative one, and an increase over the figures originally estimated, an ample allowance having been made for contingencies.

Telegraphic communication with the world, which is as far north as Dawson, B. C., which is some 1,400 miles from the south of Seattle. This is the reason for the line being known as the point of

beginning. From Dawson the line will run northwest, the principal points on the route being as follows: Fort Fraser, 125 miles distant; Hazelton, 200 miles further on; Telegraph Creek, 210 miles from Lake Athabasca; Teulon river, 124; the Babine river, 141; Little Nahlin river, 26; Pine Point river, 30; Polity river, 35; White river, 35; Sixty six river, 31; Dawson City, 45—a total of 1,425 miles.

While the places mentioned are the principal points on the line, Mr. Hammer states it is the intention of the company to establish stations every four miles. The line will, to a certain extent, be a Canadian government route, and it is expected it will be utilized very largely by the mounted police in their communications. In fact, the Canadian government has really been acting in concert with the company.

called into requisition and combined with the information furnished by a party of men who at the instance of the company took a prospecting trip some months before there was danger of sources of knowledge being sent off by winter. This latter party, Mr. Hammer states, discovered that a fairly direct line could be built and still remain in the anticipated difficulties avoided.

The route does not include the famous Chilkoot pass, but dodges the same by going to the east of this mountain of death and despair. There is no point on the proposed line where there will be a possible road just so long as the weather will permit. In fact, the construction of the line really means a new route to the Klondike, and one which is likely to find great favor with those who prefer an overland journey.

It has been necessary in planning this line constantly to bear in mind the fact that the cost of maintenance is likely to be great. Along some portions of the route the snowfall is so heavy that the line will be practically unusable for weeks regularly.

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by every year. At every station in the deep snow section it will therefore be necessary to store a sufficient quantity of provisions to last the winter. The officials of the company believe that a force of 400 telegraph operators will be required the year round. Many of these will be men who are used to hardship, and as much as can be exercised in recruiting the operators should be done before the winter sets in. It is necessary to have men in the uniform of the United States. In addition to this force of operators it will be necessary to have, it is estimated, at least 100 men more, whose duty will be to maintain the line in the winter, and to see that the weather will permit. In fact, the construction of the line really means a new route to the Klondike, and one which is likely to find great favor with those who prefer an overland journey.

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by every year. At every station in the deep snow section it will therefore be necessary to store a sufficient quantity of provisions to last the winter. The officials of the company believe that a force of 400 telegraph operators will be required the year round. Many of these will be men who are used to hardship, and as much as can be exercised in recruiting the operators should be done before the winter sets in. It is necessary to have men in the uniform of the United States. In addition to this force of operators it will be necessary to have, it is estimated, at least 100 men more, whose duty will be to maintain the line in the winter, and to see that the weather will permit. In fact, the construction of the line really means a new route to the Klondike, and one which is likely to find great favor with those who prefer an overland journey.

It has been necessary in planning this line constantly to bear in mind the fact that the cost of maintenance is likely to be great. Along some portions of the route the snowfall is so heavy that the line will be practically unusable for weeks regularly.

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called into requisition and combined with the information furnished by a party of men who at the instance of the company took a prospecting trip some months before there was danger of sources of knowledge being sent off by winter. This latter party, Mr. Hammer states, discovered that a fairly direct line could be built and still remain in the anticipated difficulties avoided.

The route does not include the famous Chilkoot pass, but dodges the same by going to the east of this mountain of death and despair. There is no point on the proposed line where there will be a possible road just so long as the weather will permit. In fact, the construction of the line really means a new route to the Klondike, and one which is likely to find great favor with those who prefer an overland journey.

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